THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY THE
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✠JOHN CARDINAL FARLEY,
Archbishop of New York.

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PREFACE
OF THE TRANSLATOR

THIS little book appeared first in French, over two hundred years ago. Its author was a priest of the Society of Jesus. Only the initial "O" of his name is given on the title-page. The French publisher says that the book, although short, contains the best that has ever been written about the religious life. It is regarded as a masterpiece of its kind. The well-known Jesuit, Father Ramière, calls it a real treasure and believes that any one who makes it known to those who wish to reach the perfection of the religious life is doing a good work. He considers himself favored to be able to recommend it most earnestly. The Vicar-

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General de Ville, of Lyons, pronounces it to be the very best book that can be offered to religious for their instruction. The German translation was very favorably received. Many religious wrote to the translator to express their sincere gratitude for having published it in German. This translation is from the German edition.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

First Part

General Rules

You have opened your heart to the voice of our most beloved Saviour, who, in His goodness and mercy, has called you to the religious life. You have courageously followed this call and have overcome all the difficulties and obstacles in your way. Up to the present you have performed all your religious duties generously, zealously, and joyously, but remember that this is not sufficient; you must persevere. If you grow lax in the observance of your rules and in your religious duties, you expose yourself to the gravest danger, and, even

more justly than the man in the Gospel, to the reproach of having laid the foundation of a magnificent structure, but of not having finished it.

Perseverance completes the work; and he who perseveres unto the end shall be crowned.

Often call to mind the special favors which God has bestowed upon you. He has chosen you from among thousands who were far more zealous in His service than you are, and who had not offended Him as often as you have offended Him. He has called you out of the world as He called the chosen people out of Egypt; and he has led you into a well-regulated and pious religious community as into a promised land. Thank Him from your heart for having done such great things in your behalf; be grateful also to all those who have encouraged and as-

sisted you in following His invitation; thank the Blessed Virgin Mary especially. Would you not feel compelled to show gratitude to one who had saved you from shipwreck on the stormy ocean and brought you to a safe harbor?

The religious who does not daily thank God for being called to a religious life proves thereby that he does not appreciate his vocation at its true value and that he is no longer worthy of it.

In all your actions let yourself be directed by the same intention which you had when you embraced the religious life. You did not take that step to practise ordinary virtues only, by observing faithfully all the commandments of God and of the Church. This is done by numbers living in the world. You chose the religious life with the desire and with the resolution of becoming a true

religious, that is to say, one who considers it his duty to strive after the highest perfection. You are expected to become more and more intimately united to God by sanctifying grace. Imitate St. Bernard who, recollecting himself, put to himself several times during the day this question: "Bernard, for what purpose didst thou enter here? Why didst thou choose this manner of living?"

The archer who does not keep his eyes fixed on the mark, will, instead of receiving a prize, earn only shame and scorn.

This intimate union with God must take root in the very depth of the soul, and it is gained by repeated acts of faith, hope, and charity, and by acts of other virtues, for instance, of adoration, praise, humiliation, and thanksgiving. You must do what Jesus Christ Himself and, after Him, all

the saints have done; that is, you must perform all your actions with perfect recollection, with a pure and pious intention, and with a perfect submission of your own will to the will of God.

We cannot become united to God, who is purity itself, except by a perfectly purified spirit.

Christ Himself has made known to us the means we must use in order to become truly spiritual. They are three. "*Renounce yourself,*" that is to say, combat all sensual inclinations, which, however innocent and pardonable they may appear, are nevertheless punishable and imbued with self-love, unless purified by a good, i. e., supernatural intention. "*Carry your cross.*" Resist the great and continual aversion which you may experience in the fulfilment of your duties which your voca-

tion imposes upon you. *"Follow me,"* that is to say, endeavor in all things always to do God's will and not your own.

He who leads a life according to his own will, and thus gratifies his own inclinations, will never acquire religious perfection; he will not make any spiritual progress. The broad road, flattering the senses, is the road that leads to hell.

If perfection, as it has been presented to you, appears difficult (it is so in fact, if measured by your own strength), then arouse in yourself a great confidence in the goodness and infinite power of Him who has graciously called you. He will never refuse you what you need in order to do what He expects of you. Look at the saints in heaven. Many of them were weaker than you are, and could not count on the special assistance which you re-

ceived; but, notwithstanding all this, they have reached their destiny. Therefore do not look for excuses to justify yourself; these excuses will not be accepted at the day of judgment.

Whoever does faithfully and perseveringly what he is able to do, will be successful in all his spiritual undertakings.

CONSIDERATION

Is it not astonishing and sad to find in religious communities persons who, after having spent therein ten or twenty years, are still attached to the world, subject to their own humors and caprices, impatient of the least contradiction and adversity, and who in the practice of their spiritual duties, are far more neglectful and, in their manner of acting, far more vacillating than people in the world? Does not all this bring dishonor on the religious life? Does

such conduct not expose one to the greatest danger of losing one's soul? Our meek Saviour one day pronounced a curse upon a fig-tree, which, though rich in foliage, was bare of fruit. And who can doubt that this same Saviour will one day, sooner or later, pronounce a far more severe sentence on those, who, whilst wearing the holy habit, did not live according to their profession? Considering this, who does not feel impelled to cry out like Moses (*Deut.* xxxii. 29): "O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end." May God grant that these unhappy religious who have been favored by God in such an extraordinary way, may come at last to their senses and realize the great danger to which they are exposed.

Change of conduct, not change of clothes, constitutes the true religious.

These few words of advice, well considered and conscientiously put into practice, should suffice to advance religious far on the way of religious perfection; but, having been requested to give some more particular instructions that may help to regulate the conduct of religious in different circumstances, I shall try to comply with this request.

Second Part

Particular Rules

First Chapter

CONDUCT TOWARDS GOD

Always cultivate a great reverence towards God. Do not, however, try to penetrate into the unfathomable depths of the Divinity. You would lose your time in fruitless considerations and speculations and endeavor to attain what is impossible for you. Endeavor, rather, to increase your knowledge of God by meditating on His almighty power, on His justice, on His boundless goodness and liberality, and on His other perfections. Often make lively acts of faith, hope, and love; praise the

divine Majesty; acknowledge gratefully the many favors which He has bestowed upon you and continues to bestow upon you in body and soul. Be ever mindful that God has called you into existence and keeps you in existence; that He has redeemed you with His precious Blood; and that He desires to take you one day to heaven and to give you a share for all eternity in His own happiness.

From the kind and charitable opinion we have of a person and the remembrance of the favors we have received from him, spring forth that reverence, esteem, love, and attachment which takes hold of our soul and heart.

Never omit, when awaking in the morning, to put yourself in the presence of God, to thank Him, and to offer yourself up to Him with all that you shall do and suffer

during the day. As He strictly required of the Israelites that they should offer up to Him each year the first-fruits, so He requires of you that you should offer up to Him each day the first thoughts and sentiments of your heart.

Whoever begins the day with good thoughts regarding God and His holy Will will hardly close the day with a sinful action.

When you hear the signal for rising in the morning do not grant the least indulgence to nature, but do holy violence to yourself by getting up at once. Be convinced that your day's work will succeed better and that your soul will derive great profit from this act of self-denial, which you bring to God as the first sacrifice of the day. Let it be your resolve, once and for all, to deprive yourself of the sensual satis-

faction which you would enjoy by resting longer. You will practise at the same time an act of obedience, by which you will prove your love for God, showing your readiness to be at once employed in His service.

The general who gains a victory over his enemy at the beginning of the day has taken the first step towards gaining a perfect victory before the day is over.

Follow the advice given by God Himself to His faithful servant Abraham to help him to become perfect, namely that he should walk always, from the early morning, in the presence of His Majesty. Frequently during the day, wherever you may be, alone or with others, make acts of faith, hope, and love of God; call to your mind the truth that the eyes of your Divine Spouse are constantly resting upon you and that all the movements of your soul as well

as those of your body are perfectly known to Him; and say often with your lips, and yet oftener with your heart: "God sees me," remembering at the same time that all your works will one day be weighed in the scale of God's infinite justice.

He who walks in the presence of God will continually make progress on the way to heaven.

At the beginning of the day make a good intention in order thereby to animate and sanctify all your actions. Offer them up humbly and cheerfully to your Creator in union with all those actions which Jesus Christ Himself performed when on earth, and with those which God Himself continually performs in you by assisting you with His grace in all that you do. As a drop of water that falls into a glass of generous wine appropriates to itself all the qualities

of the wine, so also all your actions, when performed with a good intention, will become, as it were, actions of Our Lord Himself, and will be highly pleasing in the sight of God.

A work done without a good intention is like a body without a soul; however beautiful this body may be it is only a corpse.

Although all the actions of a person consecrated to God belong to God as the fruit of a tree belongs to the owner of the tree, still spiritual exercises, recitation of the divine office, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, and prayers prescribed by the rule, as well as the reception of the Sacrament ought to be offered up to God in an especially perfect manner by those who live in religion. Therefore be intent upon performing all these actions with a most pure intention and with due recollec-

tion. Dismiss distractions at once, as soon as you become aware of them. It would be better for you to be forced to lie in bed with excruciating fever-pains than to entertain wilful distractions in your spiritual exercises; for to entertain wilful distractions is to commit a sin of irreverence which God will punish severely, if not always in this world, certainly in the other world. Remember the words of God to the prophet Jeremias (xlviii. 10): *"Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully."* Never, under any pretext, omit one of the prayers which you are bound to say, unless you are duly excused by obedience or by some urgent, necessary work. Far be it from you to omit your prayers on account of disgust or want of spiritual consolation or the distractions from which you may have to suffer. Remember that sick people do not cease to take food when they have

no appetite; they must often force themselves to eat. They know that nourishment is necessary if they wish to keep up their strength and be restored to health.

When devotion is not kept alive the soul languishes. It is only in persevering prayer that it finds its strength.

Acquire the habit of using often during the day ejaculatory prayers by the elevation of your heart to God. Nothing is so easy as this practice, because it can be performed at any time and in any place. Besides, it is extremely useful, since it is in this continual elevation of the heart to God that the spiritual life consists. It is, indeed, difficult to keep this truth always before the mind, but if you ask your guardian angel he will remind you of this holy practice. Choose a little aspiration and resolve to say it two or three times from the hour of your

rising until noon; then as many times from noon until vesper-time, and from evening until you retire to rest. You will soon find that you can use this little aspiration even oftener; and, after a while, you will become so accustomed to saying it that you cannot live, as it were, without this pious practice. Great will be its spiritual advantages, and great the treasures which you will lay up in heaven.

As often as your soul ascends to God, so often will God descend to you. From this practice arises a wonderful union with God, which is the source of many very great spiritual blessings.

It must be your constant endeavor, from early dawn until you retire to rest, to please God everywhere, and in everything. Say often from the bottom of your heart: *"I will do this out of love for Thee, my good*

God." If you meet with some suffering, then say: "*I will willingly bear this out of love for Thee, my most sweet Lord.*" When you take part in some lawful enjoyment, then say: "*It is for Thy sake, my God, that I will grant myself this pleasure.*" If there is a chance of refusing some satisfaction to the senses, then say: "*Out of love for Thee, my dear Jesus, I will not look at this; I will not make this remark; I will not taste what would be sweet to my palate; I will not listen to these delightful sounds.*" In short, in whatever you may do or suffer, say at the same time from your heart: "*All for Thee, my God, all for Thee.*"

The coin which does not bear the image of the Prince has no value in the kingdom, and the work on which is not imprinted the mark of the love of God has no value for heaven.

If you are anxious to do something which will greatly please our good God you should preserve always and everywhere an unshaken confidence in His goodness and power. No parents have ever loved their children so much and so tenderly as God loves us; and His power to help us is as boundless as His goodness. What greater consolation could be imagined, in all sufferings and trials, than this confidence in the goodness and power of Almighty God; and what more powerful motive could there be to impel us to practise good works and to lead a virtuous life?

The greater our confidence in God is, the more willing He is to help us.

You cannot always avoid occupations which seem to exhaust all your strength and demand all your attention. When this happens, then you must not allow yourself

to lose your self-control. Do your utmost to remain recollected in spirit and united to God. If you cannot continually think of Him, at least do so from time to time; offer Him your heart repeatedly; and as soon as your occupation is over, give yourself once more exclusively to God.

Religious who are obliged by obedience to occupy themselves with distracting temporal affairs, must be like a piece of wood, which, immersed in water, is kept there only as long as it is held there by force.

There is nothing which the heart of the truly pious religious desires more than the love of God. How sad it is that the love of God is often weakened and even driven out of the heart by self-love! Such people are like ignorant dealers in gems who mistake worthless stones for precious diamonds. If you wish a touchstone, by

which you can avoid any danger of being deceived, and to find out whether the true love of God still dwells in your heart, put to yourself the question, whether you rejoice as much over the good done by others as if you had done it yourself, and whether the offense committed in your sight by a stranger causes you as much sadness as if you yourself or one of your friends had offended God.

The greater the love of ourself, the less we love God.

If you are truly in earnest to belong entirely to God and to become more and more pleasing in His sight, never occupy yourself with anything but with Him. If you act differently, if you do not renounce all that is not God, you will never become truly united to Him. Be also on your guard not to desire with too great anxiety, nor too

earnestly, to join in any conversation, however pious, nor to crave inordinately any degree of perfection, however great and desirable it may be. Remember that not only what is bad, but even what is very good in itself, will impede perfection, if used indiscreetly, with too great impetuosity and zeal.

A plate of precious metal held before the eyes prevents one from seeing the sun no less than a plate of base metal.

Keep alive in yourself a great love for Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, and a deep reverence for all the mysteries of His life and passion. You must try to understand well every single one of these mysteries, if you do not wish to render yourself guilty of great ingratitude. In order not to incur this reproach imitate the heavenly spouse who made for herself a

little bouquet of all the mysteries of the life of her bridegroom and wore it upon her breast. This you also can do by often making acts of love for Our Lord; by meditating continually on the lessons contained in the mysteries of His life on earth; by having the Crucified always before your eyes; by hiding yourself in His sacred wounds; by often pronouncing with reverence His most holy Name; by visiting Him as often as you can in the Most Blessed Sacrament to adore His Sacred Humanity. It is just for this reason that the Most Blessed Sacrament is kept in the chapel, to give all the inmates of the house a chance to pay a visit to Our Lord whenever they may like to do so.

Whoever does not endeavor to love Our Lord with his whole heart after receiving so many blessings from Him, deserves to be separated from the children of God and

have his name stricken from the Book of Life.

With the reverence which you have for God and for the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord unite a sincere love and veneration for the Saints, above all for the Blessed Virgin Mary, for St. Joseph, for your Guardian Angel, for your Patron Saint, and for the Founder of your order. Give thanks to them every day for the graces which they continually obtain for you, and entreat them never to cease to assist you in the future and at last to conduct you into heaven, there to sing the praises of God with them for all eternity.

Gratitude for favors received is one of the best ways of inducing a benefactor to continue his generosity, whilst ingratitude paralyzes the hand of the most charitably inclined.

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CONSIDERATION

What confusion, what torturing despair, must take hold of the soul of a religious at the hour of death, when the moment draws near to give a strict account to the omniscient Judge of how he has fulfilled his duties, should he be conscious that, although he was strictly bound to serve God more perfectly and more generously than the common faithful, he has been less anxious than they to honor, glorify, and love Him. The loving Saviour told the Jews one day that the Ninivites would as accusers rise against them. So also will the people of the world rise against the religious on the day of judgment, and insist that God should punish them severely for having served and loved Him less in the retirement of the cloister than they in the midst of worldly occupations and distractions. How far

better it would have been if such religious had remained in the world instead of living in the convent in a manner so little in keeping with the spirit of their vocation.

We have it on the word of Our Lord Himself that it would have been better for Judas even not to be born, than to have become such an unworthy Apostle.

Second Chapter

BEHAVIOR TOWARDS THE ORDER

Look upon the order into which you have entered as a wise institution of the Holy Ghost, well adapted to lead the soul to perfection. Take delight in speaking of the special favors it has received from heaven and of the excellent services it has rendered to God and man through the great number of pious religious who have spent their lives in it happily and faithfully. Let it be your ambition to follow their example as closely as possible, so that those who enter the community after you will find it in at least as good a condition as it was when you became a member of it.

The child who by his bad conduct hurts and lessens the good reputation which was

inherited from those who were formerly members of the family, deserves to be despised and severely punished.

Esteem and praise the order to which you belong, but avoid all appearance of undervaluing other orders, for although you may consider your order to be the one best suited for you, you must not think that other orders are not equally suited and beneficial for those whom the Holy Ghost leads into them.

The son who speaks of his mother too boastfully and by doing this tries to lower the good opinion people have of other mothers does not help to make his own mother more esteemed, but rather draws down contempt upon her and upon himself.

Should you have entered a religious order, led thereto by unworthy motives, and should you now be unable to leave it with-

out giving scandal, then remain in it, for although you have chosen this order against the will of God, who destined you for some other order, it is now His will that you should remain in it. By your own fault you acted against His first plan for leading you to perfection; now follow His second plan and strive to live more piously and faithfully where you now are than you have hitherto been living.

One can atone for the abuse of his liberty in no better way than by making a virtue out of the necessity arising from his own fault.

Familiarize yourself with all the rules of your order and observe them most carefully because they are the work of the Holy Ghost. Never transgress a single one of these rules, however insignificant they may seem, out of human respect to please

others, nor out of fear of incurring their displeasure, if you do not wish to foster in yourself a tendency that may in the end cause your spiritual ruin. The rules of an order point out the way along which God intends to lead those whom He has called to perfection. They cannot disregard this path without exposing themselves to the danger of losing their vocation and all those extraordinary graces God has in store for them. Cultivate a great esteem for works peculiar to your order. Whatever employment obedience may assign you, accept it from the hand of God; however lowly it may appear in the eyes of men, look upon it as greater and nobler than any position of honor to which the world could call you. Put out of your mind, as a temptation, any desire for a different employment. The health of the body consists, above all, in this, that every member performs its func-

tions well. So, too, the perfection and the well-being of a religious community depend upon the faithfulness with which every single member performs his duties; and it often happens that the community derives far more profit and greater spiritual blessings from those who are employed in apparently mean and insignificant occupations than from him who presides over the whole community.

The religious who performs conscientiously the duties of his office deserves to be praised far more than the one who occupies a high position but is less careful in doing his duty.

Should it be your duty to make known your opinion, or to give your vote, in some matter regarding the community, pray fervently to the Holy Ghost that He may enlighten you and may inspire you with what

will be for God's greater glory and for the greater spiritual good of the order. Do not allow yourself to be influenced in the least by private or personal considerations.

Where the counselors of the commonwealth are badly advised, only disorder and ruin can be expected.

Be on your guard never to introduce into the order an innovation, no matter how little it deviates from the original spirit; and never omit, under any pretext, an exercise which the Holy Ghost has introduced. Should you act contrary to this advice, it would have been better for you to have remained in the world, where you would have given less dishonor to God and would have had to expect a less severe judgment and punishment hereafter.

The one who gives the first impulse towards the destruction of a house dedicated

to God must expect a more severe punishment than the one who finishes the destruction.

It is beyond all doubt that you are bound to love all who live with you in the same community, that you must assist them and bear with their faults; but in doing so be careful not to scandalize the community, nor bring harm to the order, which must be dearer to you than anything else.

That son is very much to be blamed who would please his brothers and sisters at the expense of grieving his mother.

If you notice that something truly blameworthy and harmful has crept into your community do not grumble about it, or speak of it to persons who cannot remove the evil, but make it known to those who can. If you cannot do this without becoming unduly excited, then have recourse to

God that He may show you what you ought to do under the circumstances. Whatever the evil may be, God is not indifferent about it, for the order is His work and He is able and willing to preserve it.

He who does not hasten to extinguish the fire in his house, deserves to be deprived of his property and to be punished severely.

Let no day pass without entreating God to bestow His richest blessings upon the whole order; to make those who have entered it persevere in their first fervor, and to call others to join it and become good members of it, imbued with the genuine spirit of the Founder.

To entreat God fervently and constantly to preserve an order in its primitive spirit proves one to be a worthy member of it.

CONSIDERATION

How has it come to pass that religious orders which came from the hand of their founder, perfect and imbued with an excellent spirit, degenerated so in the course of time that they could scarcely be recognized? This misfortune must be ascribed to three causes: The first was the neglect of superiors to watch over their subjects as carefully as their duty demanded. The second cause was the shaking off, under divers pretexts, the yoke of bodily and spiritual abnegation and mortification. The third cause was the want of interior recollection; the religious, instead of occupying themselves with God, preferred intercourse with people of the world. Is it surprising that religious, living thus, should imperceptibly imbibe the spirit of the world and

that this spirit should become sooner or later the spirit of the whole community?

The more a government has become justly renowned, the greater the disgrace of its downfall; and the more flourishing a religious community has been by its spirit and discipline, the more mortifying it must be for it to be forced to confess that it has become a prey to relaxation.

Third Chapter

CONDUCT TOWARDS ONE'S SELF

God has given you existence without your co-operation, but He insists emphatically upon your co-operation in order to lead you to perfection. Every single one of your actions should help you to obtain this end. If, then, it is your sincere and earnest will to perform all your actions well, let the example of the Son of God be always before you; conform your whole conduct to His. This is only doing what He Himself enjoins us to do when He says: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also" (*John* xiii. 15). The more these words of Our Lord are followed, the greater progress is made on the road of perfection.

Only that apprentice will become a perfect master in his art who, after finding an excellent master, takes pains to observe him at his work and tries his best to imitate him as closely as possible.

In all your actions be modest and humble, be considerate in your words, upright in your deportment; do not give way to sadness; neither allow yourself to be carried away by immoderate mirth and too loud laughter; far from you be mockery and anything that may cause you spiritual losses; avoid vain-glory in word and action, and let your countenance always indicate the peace and serenity dwelling in your heart.

Modesty is the garment of the Heavenly Spouse, by which she becomes pleasing to God, venerable to men, and formidable to hell.

Avoid idleness as the mother and nurse of vices and the poison of all virtues. Be always occupied in such a manner that your mind may not be overburdened with too many things and too many cares. You may have read or heard of the apparition which was granted to St. Anthony, the Hermit, after he had entreated God to let him know the manner of living that was best fitted to lead religious on the road to perfection. He saw an angel, who, after having prayed for some time, began to work; after working for some time he returned to prayer; and after having thus spent the whole day he cried out: "Anthony, behold, this is the rule of spending their time which you must give to thy brothers, to help them to progress on the road to perfection."

As the ailments of the body usually have their cause in taking either too little or too

much nourishment, so imperfections have their cause in idleness, that is to say, in doing too little, or in trying to do too much.

Love and practise silence, which cannot be recommended too highly to all who aspire after perfection. Silence will free you from many temporal and spiritual troubles and will bring you many spiritual blessings. The Holy Ghost tells us that sin abounds where there is much talking. By this He also teaches us that virtue is the offspring of silence. Was it not during the midst of the night, when silence reigned, that the Son of God entered the world to redeem us? So does the Holy Ghost during the time of silence communicate Himself to souls, to render them perfect.

When the spouse is silent then the heavenly bridegroom speaks to her. Never was a talkative religious a perfect one.

Living in a well-ordered religious community, avoid all self-will, not only in regard to making a good use of your time in active works, but also, and especially, in regard to your spiritual occupation. If you do not do this, you will be like a sheep roving about in the desert of the cloister, exposed to the ravages of time and to the malicious powers of hell. Is it not a pitiful sight to see, in a religious community, persons who practise with far more zeal certain little devotions, and give them up with far more difficulty, than the prayers and the divine office which they are bound to recite?

Self-will is one of the most cunning daughters of pride, which is always intent on making itself felt. Pride exposes the soul to the greatest danger of being led astray and of being lost.

In whatever position you may find yourself, you can do something or nothing. If you can do something, do it for God's sake as well as possible; but, if you can do nothing, patiently bear with your inability, and do not worry about it, but recommend yourself and all to God. This manner of acting will always prove profitable for your advancement in spiritual perfection; the contrary will only trouble uselessly and annoy you.

It is as certain a fault to attempt to do what is beyond our ability, as it is to omit what we can do and are bound to do.

Do not desire extraordinary heavenly favors, especially those which carry with them some external sign of sanctity. Should you receive such a favor without having desired and asked for it, do not think much of yourself on account of it,

and do not speak of it except when obliged to do so, and then not without great humility. Did not Judas possess the gift of miracles, and Caiphas of prophecy? Did not Simon Magus attract universal attention?

The more virtue hides itself, the more safe it is. Of far more worth is the pious, hidden, interior life, than external splendor.

Do not seek for help except from God and from your superiors; otherwise, you will offend the goodness of God, which has taken you under its protection from the time you confided yourself to it, and which is powerful enough to help you. Besides, it would avail you nothing to put your trust in a creature whose power is limited, and who can hold forth to you only vain and empty promises which God will scatter like smoke; moreover, if the splendor of your

soul did not become greatly diminished under these circumstances it would simply be due to God's great mercy in dealing with you.

He who leans upon a reed is sure to fall and perhaps be dangerously wounded.

The desire to taste the forbidden fruit and to listen to the cunning remarks of the tempter was the cause of our first parents being driven out of paradise, and this led to the ruin of innumerable souls. It is strictly necessary to wage a continual war against curiosity. Do not regret the pain and trouble it will cost you to resist this natural inclination. Victory will free you from a great deal of worry and anxiety and will put you, instead, in possession of a heavenly state of tranquillity.

Curiosity is always uneasy and renders the soul unfit for the practice of true piety.

Nothing is more dangerous for a religious than sensual attachment which hides itself under the mantle of friendship. This is one of the most subtle means by which the tempter draws a heart into his net and away from God. To hide his scheme the better he is accustomed to infuse into the poor heart a certain reverence for the loved object, accompanied with sentiments of false piety. As long as the eye of the soul sees clearly it will soon discover the mischievous cunning. As infallible marks of this affection may be mentioned: Frequent thinking of the loved object and of all that is connected with it; an impetuous desire to be in its company; the endeavor to come into the possession of articles belonging to it as a means to keep alive its remembrance; unbecoming, and even ridiculous lamentations, when forced to be separated from it.

The most dangerous and fatal attachments are wont to begin with the spirit and end with the flesh.

Take your rest, your food, and your recreation for necessity's sake, not for the pleasure which the senses naturally experience therein. In actions that occupy the body more than the mind remember that you are a Christian and a religious; direct all by a good intention to the greater glory of God. Imitate the birds which bend their heads only when drinking and at once raise them again towards heaven.

In the same measure that we gratify our sensuality do we suffer a loss of the spirit of piety.

Renounce generously all spiritual consolations, and, if you at times receive them, take no satisfaction in them, but receive them as a pure gift of the goodness of God

to encourage you in the service of your Creator. You will be an object of pleasure in the sight of God only when you serve Him, as it were, at your own expense, without seeking your own interest in anything, renouncing everything that might be regarded as a hireling's reward. What would you think of a son who loved his father's gift more than his father himself? And what must we think of a religious who values consolations and interior pious sentiments more than solid virtue and perfect submission to the Holy Will of God?

The fountain is always to be preferred to the water flowing out of it; and God, the fountain of all that is good, must be loved far more than all the gifts He may bestow upon us.

To become truly perfect in the sight of God you must not only renounce the grati-

fication of the senses and all spiritual consolations, but you must also bear resignedly whatever bodily and spiritual afflictions God may send you, because sufferings are highly beneficial for religious persons. The patience with which we suffer, for the love of God, whatever happens to us is the surest mark of our belonging to the number of His chosen ones.

In the fire of the furnace the true gold appears; and in sufferings the genuine friends of God become known.

Keep vanity very far from you. It is the gnawing worm that injures and destroys the most perfect actions; it is the poison that corrodes works otherwise highly meritorious, and even renders them displeasing in the sight of God. It is a fatal rock on which most virtuous souls often suffer shipwreck. I adjure you, be

on your guard against this powerful enemy of your soul; never allow vanity to enter your heart. Whatever may be your occupation, be satisfied with being seen by God alone. Let it be enough for you to please Him, by cheerfully and faithfully giving to Him what the world is so anxious to give to you. Sooner or later, you may be sure, honor will come to you, with less danger and with greater splendor.

Vanity often gathers with very little satisfaction what virtue has sown with great labor.

Want of constancy is a very common fault. Many have a very docile mind, and give themselves willingly and generously to the practice of virtue when first they realize its beauty; but they lack the energy of will to complete the work they have begun. They should often meditate on what they

have resolved, and should unceasingly ask of God the grace of perseverance in their good resolutions. Advance on the road of perfection like the sun, which has not swerved from its course during thousands of years.

The soul will be saved only by persevering in the path of virtue until death.

Avoid carefully all wilful faults and look upon them as totally incompatible with the religious life. Spiritual writers consider smaller sins in a way more dangerous for a religious than more serious transgressions, for should he have the misfortune of falling into mortal sin he would not fail to be aware of it at once, nor could find rest until he had humbly confessed it; on the other hand, if he is careless about avoiding venial sins he becomes more and more insensible to them, and commits them with a

steadily decreasing remorse of conscience and thus the broad road to the greatest sins is opened. It was not bears or boars that devastated the vineyard of the bridegroom; the damage was done by little foxes.

A little spark may cause a far more disastrous conflagration than a large burning coal which is put out at once.

In conversation and at the usual recreation at home, accustom yourself to speak about spiritual things, as your vocation requires. In this way you will do something very pleasing to God, and very profitable to your soul. You will render yourself more fit for prayer, and you will edify highly those who hear you.

The language which has God for its subject comes doubtless from a heart that loves Him.

Observe most conscientiously the three vows by which as by three nails you are fastened to the cross of your Heavenly Spouse in the eyes of heaven and earth. Whatever may be the endeavors of the world, of the devil and of the flesh, the three envious enemies of your true happiness; whatever may be the attacks which they make upon you; whatever the inducements and allurements with which they approach you and try to entice you to descend from the cross, or at least to free yourself from it ever so little; never allow yourself to be conquered. This would be your shame, your misfortune, and your ruin.

Vows conscientiously observed are powerful wings for elevating the soul to heaven, but if neglected they become a heavy load, which drags the soul into the abyss of hell.

The vow of poverty frees the religious from the cares and anxiety connected with the possession of earthly goods and makes the soul put its trust entirely into the Providence of God. Although forbidding the possession of private property, it allows the religious to partake of all that belongs to the community. Having chosen this lovely virtue by your own free will, dismiss all anxiety regarding your temporal welfare; accept nothing and give nothing, whatever it may be, without your superior's permission, if you do not wish to incur God's displeasure.

It is very great foolishness to have broken courageously the golden and silver fetters, which hold so many souls in the world captive under the yoke of the devil, and then to allow yourself in the cloister to be bound by weak and contemptible

things. To renounce all those claims which one could have made justly in the world and then to attach oneself to trifles in the cloister is certainly to act in a very inconsequent and unreasonable manner.

If you experience a desire to possess something, consider whether it be necessary for you or not. If you do not need it, make up your mind to do without it and so take a pleasure in tasting of the fruit of the tree of life, which is nothing else but poverty. If, however, you really do need something, then ask for it humbly from those who have the right to give it to you. Should they grant your petition thank God and show your gratitude. Should they refuse your petition, submit patiently and resignedly, without allowing yourself to give way to ill-humor, although your health and even your life itself should become endangered by the refusal. What more

glorious death could you desire than to die in the practice of so noble a virtue?

To take the vow of poverty and not be willing to bear all the consequences of it is to be guilty of hypocrisy, which is very hateful to God and brings ruin to the soul.

The perfect vow of obedience deprives the soul of its own will and its own desires and thus frees it from two sources of all kinds of imperfections and sins. For this reason be always on your guard not to do anything that may not be in harmony with your vow of obedience. Observe this vow perfectly, so that on the day of judgment, when questioned regarding the works performed by you during your lifetime, you may answer: "I have performed them all because I was ordered to perform them by obedience." What a sweet consolation for the soul to give such an answer! How

short will be the examination and how merciful the judgment!

No obedient religious was ever lost and no disobedient one ever went straight to heaven.

With the vow of obedience the religious brings to God the most pleasing sacrifice that can be made to Him, because by it is offered the most precious gift that one can have in this world. For this reason a religious who gives himself entirely to the will of his superiors, and renounces his own will, even in the smallest things, gives more honor to his Creator, than if he should, by following his own will, call to life again all the dead in the graveyard and convert a whole city.

The obedient man will celebrate victories during his lifetime and will gain a heavenly crown at his death.

The vow of chastity frees the soul from all kinds of sensual attachments and thus frees it at the same time from an insatiable and mean tyrant. The soul, having been elevated above natural inclinations, becomes like the angels; having been set free from the desire of the flesh, it approaches God and becomes His bride. Let it be your constant endeavor to guard chastity as the pupil of your eye. Shun the least danger of soiling it more carefully than you would shun the most disgusting and contagious disease. The words "chastity" and "holiness" are the same in the Greek language, and in fact the one cannot exist without the other.

The woman of lowly rank who has become the spouse of a king merits an extraordinary punishment if she be found wanting in fidelity.

Humility is the best custodian of chastity, as it is the common custodian of all virtues. No one can continue to be chaste if he be not humble. Humility is the solid foundation of religious perfection; by it is measured infallibly the degree of progress made in the spiritual life. St. Augustine says: "It is a truth that does not admit of doubt that, in the same measure as you have humbled yourself in this world for the love of God, God will exalt you in the other world." What excuse will you find for practising this virtue? To practise it, nothing but good will is required. Almost continually you will find occasions to humble yourself. Seek always what is plain and simple, which is found more easily than what is great and splendid. Consider yourself as one who has merited very little consideration, and who is an imperfect and unworthy member of the community; as

one who has made a bad use of the special graces and blessings bestowed upon him by God. Do not reflect about how pious and zealous you may be. A little temptation may suffice to make of a beautiful angel an ugly demon.

God delights in exalting those who humble themselves, and He humbles those who exalt themselves.

Should you, out of disgust or out of levity, have left the path of religious perfection which you had entered upon so generously, and have instead entered on the broad road of an irregular life, and should you, consequently, have fallen into great faults and even into sins that are, indeed, very harmful for your vocation, listen to the urgent reproach of your Divine Spouse, which you will hear in the depth of your heart: "Come, Sunamite, return to your

God." Then enter at once into yourself and realize the miserable condition in which you are, and say in the inmost recess of your soul: "My God and my Savior, I have grievously offended Thee; I am truly sorry for it; grant me the grace to do penance, and let me at once begin to serve Thee, from now on, more faithfully and more fervently, in order to make up fully for my former neglect and unfaithfulness."

When God knocks at the door of our heart, no time must be lost in opening to Him.

There can be no doubt that many religious, when about to die, will suffer from great remorse of conscience because they have been less intent upon reaching religious perfection than artists upon perfecting themselves in their respective arts. Can you imagine a person possessing so lit-

tle intelligence and feeling as not to be ashamed at finding himself after seven or eight years of instruction in farming, building, or in any other trade just as awkward as on the first day? What maiden would not be ashamed of herself, if, after two or more years of instruction in sewing, embroidering, or similar work, she should be almost as unskilful as on the first day that she began to receive instruction? It is only in religious communities that one finds persons who do not blush at having, after fifteen or twenty years of religious profession, made no more progress than in the first months of their noviceship. It even happens at times that the longer they live in a religious community, the farther they find themselves from perfection. May we not say with good reason that it would have been better for them if they had died during their noviceship, or soon after it, since

death would then have found them better prepared? May we not with sorrow and bitter tears exclaim: "The children of the world are indeed far more prudent in their generation than the children of light?" They take more trouble to acquire profits of doubtful value, the possession of which renders them more or less unhappy, than some religious to secure heavenly treasures whose enjoyment will be without a flaw for eternity. After all, nobody doubts the truth: *Labor and trouble must be in proportion to the honor and reward that is expected.*

Fourth Chapter

CONDUCT TOWARDS YOUR SUPERIORS

The happiness and unhappiness, the piety and relaxation of a religious community depends far more upon Superiors than upon anything else. For this reason it is they who must be blamed before all others, if discipline and religious spirit are not what they should be. We can never suppose that any one enters a religious community with the intention of leading an easy and lukewarm life; on the contrary, they embrace the religious life with the intention of acquiring greater spiritual perfection. If their Superior understands how to encourage them, it is al-

most impossible that they should not become saints; if, however, their Superior has no zeal or knowledge of the different influences that act upon the soul, who, for want of virtue and religious spirit, does not give a good example, who is seeking only his own comfort, they cannot be expected to observe carefully and cheerfully all the rules and practices of the community.

Good Superiors are the most precious gifts that God can bestow upon a community.

Since the happiness of a religious community depends so much on its Superior, do not allow yourself, in the choice of Superiors, to be led by your own private interest, or by the suggestions of your own imperfection; but pray to the Holy Ghost, ask Him by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints of your order,

of the Guardian Angels of your community, and those who once lived with you in the same community and are now in heaven, to enlighten you to choose as Superiors those who are best fitted to promote the spiritual as well as the temporal welfare of the order.

If the head is healthy, then all the members of the body experience its beneficial influence.

If you ask whom you should choose as Superior, I answer: "Choose the most humble, the one who has no desire at all to be Superior; secondly, choose the one who is most occupied with God, and least with his own interest; thirdly, choose the one who has the greatest love for the order and is most conscientious in strictly observing all its rules; fourthly, choose the one who is most prudent in the management of the

temporal affairs of the community, and who shows the least inclination to converse with people of the world. If no one can be found possessing all these qualifications, then choose the one who has at least the most important of them."

It is a great blessing for a religious order to have as Superiors only such as are fit to be Superiors.

The Superior having been chosen, look upon him not as a person who like yourself is subject to imperfections, but recognize in him the one who is to hold in your regard the place of God. Religious who honor God in their Superiors will be rewarded as if they had honored God Himself. Those who, on the contrary, omit or refuse to do so, will be punished most severely by God, who will consider the offense as an offense committed against His own Divine Maj-

esty. The history of all times is proof that God acts in this way.

The offense that is committed against him whom the Prince has appointed to hold his place is held to be directed against the Prince himself, and the laws punish such an offense as high treason.

Obey your Superior at once and cheerfully, not on account of his wisdom and prudence, for this would be an obedience according to the spirit of the world, and would be disgraceful for a religious; neither obey him because he belongs to a rich and noble family, for this would be the obedience of a servant of mean character, always willing to do whatever may be pleasing to others to gain their favor; neither obey the Superior because he has it in his power to force you to fulfil his orders in case you should not be willing to

do so, for this would be the obedience of a slave, who justly merits chastisement; neither obey because your Superior is a person pleasing to you, and who tries to order you to do what is according to your liking, for that would be the obedience of a capricious and spoiled child, who deserves to be punished. Obey your Superior solely because he holds the place of Him to whom you have offered up your own will. That is the true religious obedience which is sure of a great reward in heaven.

The truly obedient religious looks only to God.

Have a great confidence in your Superior, delight in keeping nothing secret from him. Have recourse to him in all your troubles with an even greater confidence than a daughter shows to her mother; look upon all he arranges as good, even

if it should go against your inclination and judgment, unless, indeed, you should see in it a positive sin. To act thus means to live as a true religious, as one who walks on the direct road to heaven.

The rule of life, which God Himself declares to be a sure one, is infallible.

Be willing to have your Superior make you aware of your faults, and, in order that he may do this the more readily, remind him at times and even entreat him to do so. Do we not esteem a mother who can not bear the sight of the least spot on her child without calling its attention to it, much more than the mother who, seeing the child covered with disgusting stains, would act as if she did not see them?

The religious who likes to be corrected is on the sure road to perfection; but the one who hates and refuses to listen to correc-

tions will ever remain far from reaching the perfection of his vocation.

Never complain of your Superiors, and do not listen to those who delight in criticizing them and grumbling about them. To join in such acts and to do the same would be for you a great misfortune. If Eve had not listened to the cunning words of the tempter, when in her hearing he blamed God's command not to eat of the fruit, she would not have had to suffer so much, nor would she have incurred the danger of being lost for all eternity. Look upon all those who find fault with the orders of a Superior as likenesses of the satanic serpent. By trying to make you have a bad opinion of your Superior, they rob him of that confidence which is due to him and thus do him a great injury.

The member of the body which is not in connection with the head must necessarily die and decay.

It is the will of God that you nourish for your Superior a special attachment, and that you endeavor to do always what is pleasing to him, remembering that he holds the place of God. But you are strictly forbidden to flatter him, or to seek his favor and affection by unworthy means, for instance, by uncharitable reports about other members of the community. Is it not disgraceful to meet in a religious community persons whose sole care is directed towards winning the good graces of their Superiors by trying to be always near them, to discover their inclinations and likings, and thus to be able to please them in everything and to induce them to grant whatever they may wish.

It seems that mean self-love and self-interest have not enough slaves in the world, and so they try to force their way also into religious communities, where the freedom of the children of God should reign exclusively and alone.

Be grateful to all who have ever been your Superiors; preserve for them a special esteem, but do this always in such a manner that the confidence which you owe to your actual Superior may not be diminished, for it is through his administration that God will give you His graces now, just as He gave them before through your former Superiors. If you act contrary to this, if you allow yourself to be led by the advice of your former Superiors, you act in a manner that will cause dissatisfaction to yourself, will lead you into numberless errors, and will help to bring about the ruin of the community.

A body with two heads is a disgusting monster, which can be expected to live only for a short time.

If by the permission of God's providence you belong to a religious community, which has as a Superior, one who is led by caprice, by distrust, and by false reports, pleasing himself in humbling you whenever occasion offers, do not desist from giving him all those tokens of esteem which his office demands. Think of Him for whose love you have submitted yourself to a life of obedience; and should the aversion which you experience be ever so great, conquer it generously, remembering the extreme grief which Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered, when He saw Himself so shamefully treated by the Jews, abandoned by the Apostles, condemned by Pilate, and even deserted by His own Heavenly Father.

Then put your trust in God's powerful help, which will come in due time.

When the mother does not act as a mother, then the father takes a special care of the children.

CONSIDERATION

To what must we ascribe the fact that whilst in former times, as we are told by history, it was an easy task for one Superior to direct two or three thousand religious, yes, even a greater number, it is in our times, as experience proves, often very difficult for a Superior to direct only a small number. There can be no doubt that one of the reasons is this: that in former times all those who petitioned to be admitted into a religious community used to prepare themselves in the world for such a life. They took this step after long and earnest deliberation; and then entered the

community with so great a desire to change their manner of living and to become perfect, that those who were appointed to direct them had but to find out new means to assist them in their battle against their evil inclinations, and to assist them in their ardent desire to become more and more united to God. But in our times some persons leave the world rather to relieve their families and to secure a home, than to sanctify themselves. They are often so sensitive that they will not suffer for virtue's sake a part of what they would have to suffer if they remained in the world. What a difficult task to direct such persons according to the rules of religious perfection! Have pity, therefore, on your Superiors, who try their best to please their inferiors, and to accommodate themselves to their different characters and inclinations, and are at the same time

fully aware that they have to give to God an account of the spiritual progress of every single one of them. Entreat God continually to give to every one of your Superiors in abundance the necessary prudence and virtues to fulfil their duties well, and be very careful not to make their office a greater burden to them by your want of religious spirit.

It is a sign of utter heartlessness to see one's mother groan under the weight of a heavy burden and even to increase its weight instead of assisting her to render it lighter.

Fifth Chapter

CONDUCT TOWARDS THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

Let all the members of your community know that you have a sincere esteem for them. Be very careful not to give the least sign of despising any one, and avoid as much as possible what may give any one just cause for offense. What a scandal it is to find in a religious community persons who, because they belong to a noble family, have little or no regard for others and look upon them with pity and contempt. But it would be far more sad, if others of humble birth should be guilty of disrespect towards those whom they would have considered it a great honor to be allowed to serve in the world.

The life of those who live in a religious community should be like to that of the saints in heaven, where all contemplate, honor, esteem, and love one another in God.

Look upon all with whom you live as you would look upon the saints of heaven, if they should come upon earth. Acting thus you will not find anything to blame; all with whom you have to live in the community will then appear good to you, notwithstanding some unfavorable appearances.

Whenever you feel disquieted by some suspicion which forces itself into your heart, refuse your consent to it at once, with all the power of your will, God helping you by His grace. Recollect yourself, humble yourself before God by remembering your own faults and sins and cry out: "O my Lord, have mercy on me, proud

that I am and guilty in Thy sight. I should throw myself at the feet of the one whom I have the presumption to judge."

The one who abstains from judging his neighbor may expect a merciful judge in our Lord.

Speak of all the members of your community with great respect. Avoid conversing in secret with any one in the community, and never listen to backbiting. Be very much on your guard about spreading bad rumors about any one; this could easily disturb peace and concord and diminish mutual hearty affection.

The calumniator may bring spiritual ruin to the most pious community. He who speaks badly of members of the community undermines it slowly; he who causes discord pulls it down from its foundation. All such are on the road to eternal misery.

Make it a rule not to contradict any one unless otherwise you would seem to approve of what is really bad; do not insist stubbornly on defending your own opinion in a manner not in conformity with charity, which is the queen of virtues; on the contrary, humbly submit your judgment to that of others for charity's sake. If it be necessary to defend your opinion, state quietly your reasons for doing so for truth's sake, not in order that your superiority may be acknowledged.

The contentious spirit is like an animal, which attacks other animals and is shunned by every one of them.

If you notice in members of your community faults which only the Superior can remedy, then you are obliged in conscience to make your Superior aware of them; otherwise you would render yourself guilty of them, and the evil consequences would

be put to your account; be on your guard, however, lest you give this information out of envy, aversion, revenge, or any passion. Do your best to be perfectly sure of what you say, and do not add as true what is doubtful, if you do not wish to make yourself guilty of the shameful sin of calumny, for which complete reparation is difficult and forgiveness hard to obtain.

The religious who makes known the faults of members of the community with the good intention of having them corrected, tries to diminish them rather than to magnify them, and he renders to the individual member and to the community a great service. The one who acts otherwise is a disturber of concord and union.

Feel the happiness and the misfortune of the other members of the community as your own; rejoice from your heart over

what gives them joy and grieve over what causes them pain and sorrow. Do all you can to console them. As the religious community forms but one spiritual body, whose head is Jesus Christ, it is but right that the members should share all joys and sorrows and mutually participate in them.

When one member of the body suffers pain all the other members feel the pain also; should this not be the case, then it would be evident that they are wanting in life and vitality.

As much as possible repress all natural aversion and shun all particular friendships. They are two equally dangerous excrescences of corrupt nature. They bring disaster and ruin to the most pious communities. They are more dangerous and more contagious diseases because they enter the heart through the attraction of a

highly seductive sensuality. It takes great care and pains to guard against this danger. How sad it is to see religious, who have broken courageously and generously the heavy chains of flesh and blood which bound them to their parents, allow themselves then, in the perfect state of religion, to become slaves of a particular friendship. On the other hand, is it not distressing to see one who has entered a religious order to aspire therein after a higher perfection because he was not satisfied with the Christian perfection, which commands us to love our neighbor, nevertheless wilfully and deliberately in after-life entertain in his heart aversion against his associates, so that sometimes he cannot bear the sight of them.

Wilful aversion against our neighbor is totally incompatible with the spirit of Christianity, and particular friendships may cause the total ruin of Christian perfection.

Do not be envious if other members of the community enjoy greater confidence than you receive and are preferred to you; and do not be jealous if others receive more tokens of esteem and love than are given to you. Repress at once all motions of self-love as soon as you become aware of them. Thank God often from your heart for all gifts, graces, and favors, which He has bestowed upon others and continues to bestow upon them; and entreat Him to preserve and increase these gifts, if it be for His own greater glory and for the greater spiritual profit of the recipients. O admirable mystery, to be enabled to lay up precious treasures in Heaven, without incurring the least danger and with so little trouble!

The true love of our neighbor is, in fact, a philosopher's stone nowhere else to be found, which changes everything into gold;

envy, on the contrary, is that deadly poison which brought spiritual death to Lucifer in heaven and cast him with many other angels into hell.

Among the many occasions which a religious person finds to practise heroic virtues and thus to heap up rich treasures for eternity, one of the most frequent is in accommodating himself to the different characters with which he has to live in a religious community, and in bearing patiently their manifold weaknesses. There can be no doubt that such charitable bearing of another's faults and weaknesses is far more difficult than fasting, scourging, and similar severe practises, on account of the continual violence to self that is required to bear with others; and for this reason it is the more pleasing and meritorious in the sight of the Divine Majesty.

When one tries for the love of God, to become all to all, God will give Himself most willingly to that soul.

It would be a great disorder in a religious community and a sure sign of approaching ruin, if the younger members should have but little esteem for the older ones and should refuse to listen to their well-meant and useful advice; but not less unjustly would the older members act if they should reproach and correct the younger members as though they were mere children and servants. The younger ones owe to the older ones a great and heartfelt reverence, and the older ones owe to the younger ones a considerate and cordial love. Charity and reverence are the two scales which justice holds at equal height in her hands, so that to every member in the community shall be given what is due to him, thus to form a beautiful union of

many hearts, which union is the true mother of a holy community.

Age deserves to be honored on account of the virtues acquired by a long and laborious life; and youth deserves charitable consideration for its effort to acquire perfection.

Guard against certain tokens of intimacy which may be pardonable in less educated persons in the world, but are unbecoming in religious. Among them may be mentioned: Accosting one another too familiarly; touching one another without due respect; using too unrestrained or too tender expressions in speaking to one another. Such intimacies and the like never last long; they have their root either in unsteadiness of mind, or in the agreement of ill-regulated sentiments. Having reached their end and ceased, they often become the

cause of many disorders. The old adage remains true: *"Familiarity breeds contempt; contempt begets disagreement; and disagreement enters on the road to ruin."* Do not seek out religious who are willing to flatter you and to yield to your natural inclinations, however unworthy they may be. Instead, seek out those who are willing to correct you charitably, and not to let the least imperfection pass without trying to call your attention to it and to help you to get rid of it. Look upon the first class as hidden enemies who will one day be the first to condemn you openly as they condemn you already in their hearts; but recognize in the latter class your sincere friends who work for your true advancement and salvation.

Flattery is distinguished from true friendship in this, that it tries to please in order to benefit itself, whereas true friend-

ship, even when reproaching and correcting, intends to benefit others.

The true religious, like a guileless dove, does not feel indignation and revengefulness, and is far from nourishing sentiments of hatred against those who have done and said what can be justly considered an offense. On the contrary the true religious willingly suffers unjust and harsh treatment and even rejoices at having a chance to imitate the suffering of our Divine Master. Are you really in earnest about becoming a true religious? Why not? You have a splendid chance to become one by the grace of God, which will not be wanting to you. Repress at once all sentiments of aversion, and in so doing be guided by supernatural motives. With regard to the frictions that cannot be avoided, humble yourself and be the first to ask pardon, even though you are less at fault.

Pray especially for any who by bearing ill-will against you, give you a chance to acquire heavenly riches; and carefully make use of every occasion that presents itself to render them service.

Rendering good for evil is a holy work that is practised by the faithful servants of Christ.

CONSIDERATION

The esteem and love which the first Christians had for one another was one of the most efficacious means which God made use of to lead many heathen nations into the infant Church; but, when this mutual esteem began to decrease, and the mutual love began to grow cold, this attraction began to grow less evident and the nations to show less willingness to embrace the Faith. Religious communities have shared in this disaster. The more the people in the world

became aware of the love and esteem which the members of religious communities had for one another, the greater was the number of those who left home, parents, and friends to become religious, so that St. John Chrysostom could say that at his time Greece possessed as many religious as secular houses. In the one city of Antioch St. Julia saw herself surrounded by ten thousand religious women; but when mutual esteem and mutual cordiality decreased in religious houses, numbers of people in the world thought of religious communities with a kind of aversion, and if some entered them it was often done without the right intention and without due preparation. History tells us that God's providence, which is particularly intent on preserving the first spirit which He infused into an order when it was founded, is wont to erect on the ruins of a degenerate order that has

lost its spirit a new one, which will flourish in the Church of God just as long as its members continue to esteem and love one another truly.

It has at all times been the conviction that one can serve God most perfectly where mutual love and esteem holds sway.

Sixth Chapter

CONDUCT TOWARDS INFERIORS

You would grossly deceive yourself if, when chosen to be a Superior you would imagine that you had nothing else to do but to command others and to live according to your own liking. You know full well that it is the Superior's strict duty to take as much care of his inferiors as of himself. In the measure in which they have renounced everything to abandon themselves entirely to God's providence, you, who hold the place of God's providence, are bound to take care of them. It is your bounden duty to look out for all their temporal and spiritual wants, to assist them in all their difficulties, to love

them as sons and daughters, to honor them as spouses of Jesus Christ, Who has confided them to your care, and Who will one day call upon you to give a strict account.

Upon the care and watchfulness of the shepherd depend his reward and the well-being of his flock.

Remember that it is an ascertained fact, that the three most excellent rulers who ever kept watch over the children of God, Moses, St. Peter, and, above all, Our Lord Jesus Christ, were remarkable for their extraordinary love. Be led by great mildness. Whenever you have to give a command, do it humbly, in a manner that is more like a petition. When you grant a favor do it with kindness. When your duty requires of you to refuse a request do it in such a way that your inferiors cannot

help noticing that you feel sorry that you cannot grant it. When you are called upon to reprove do so without pride, without being unduly excited, and, especially, without being led by any unruly passion.

The mildness of the commander is a sweet honey that removes the bitter taste which is so often experienced in the execution of an order.

Call to your mind that terrible vision in which the Superiors of an order appeared all in fire, for their excessive and harmful leniency. They had abandoned the discipline of the order to the arbitrary will of each member of it. Desiring to please all members of the community, they had brought down spiritual ruin upon the whole order. Never, therefore, let the transgression of the rules and customs of your order pass unpunished. If you are convinced

that mildness on your part will not induce a religious to do his duty, add severity to the mildness. Jesus, the mildest of all the children of men, reproached St. Peter very severely, often blamed His apostles with indignation, and did not take back the scathing words with which He reproached the Pharisees.

The good shepherd must take with him not oil alone, but vinegar as well, so as to use it in case of necessity.

The most necessary virtue for a Superior is prudence, not the worldly prudence of which St. James speaks, which is only intent on making oneself loved by others, and on spending the time of Superiorship in a pleasant manner, careless of what may be the consequences; but a spiritual and heavenly prudence, led by which a Superior uses all the means in his power to render his

subjects more spiritual and virtuous; the heavenly prudence which enables the Superior to understand well the character and the special needs of every single one of his subjects. Such prudence, like a wise physician, prescribes remedies that are according to the nature of the spiritual disease, being always ready rather to amputate a decaying limb than to allow the whole body to be infected. Often and perseveringly entreat the Holy Ghost to bestow this necessary virtue upon you in an ever-increasing abundance. It is a plant not to be found in the soil of the world; the Heavenly Gardener alone can plant it in our hearts.

Prudence is as necessary for a Superior for the guidance of a community as a rudder is necessary for a pilot to direct the ship.

When distributing offices do not allow yourself to be led too much by a desire to

satisfy the members of the community; but have before all, before your eyes, their spiritual welfare. Before acting pray to the Holy Ghost that He may enlighten you to know those who are the most fitted for the different offices. After having appointed them do not omit to inquire from time to time how they fulfil their duties. Imitate the vigilance of a commander, who, although having full confidence in the ability and faithfulness of his officers, visits them from time to time, in order to assure himself that they are really doing their duty.

Although a Superior must never seem to mistrust his inferiors, he must, however, never cease to be watchful.

The novitiate is the quarry out of which the stones are cut for the heavenly dwelling of a religious community; for a perfect novice will in time become a perfect reli-

gious, and out of perfect religious God makes His saints. For this reason choose as master of novices one who is deeply imbued with the spirit of the order, so that he may, by word and example, instil this spirit, imperceptibly, but surely, into the hearts of the novices. It is said that plants which stand near trees out of which resin flows are quite aromatic; even so, novices are likely to gain a participation in the virtues of their master of novices.

The child experiences throughout its whole life the effect of the milk which it has sucked at its mother's breast.

Since it is your conviction that a religious vocation is not a vocation for all, do not allow yourself in admitting novices to be influenced by the splendor of riches. Riches are by no means required by God. Neither should you allow yourself to be

influenced by noble birth; for such a consideration has brought many religious communities to the brink of ruin. Do not listen to the entreaties of parents who often welcome the cloister as a desirable and honorable home for children less gifted mentally or bodily, so that they may be able to bestow more money and care on the other children of the family. Do not listen to flesh and blood, which are such bad advisers that it would be surprising if they should not deceive you under the pretext of proper love for relatives. Examine, rather, with great care whether the character of those who present themselves is suited for a religious community, and whether their call has all the marks of coming from God. If you admit into the religious community a person who is not surely called by God, who does not possess piety, who knows nothing about self-denial, this

individual will soon enter the broad road; he may hinder the other members of the community from reaching perfection, and will bring to the community many temporal and spiritual troubles.

A single sheep suffering from a contagious disease very often infects the whole flock.

You may allow members of your community to see persons in the parlor when asked for; first, if you know that the visitors are respectable persons; secondly, if the visits are not frequent; thirdly, if the conversation does not last too long and if the religious, after such intercourse with people of the world, are more obedient and more charitable towards the members of the community, and appear to be more spiritually recollected. But, if you do not know the persons who pay these visits; if

they come too often and remain longer than is necessary; if the religious, in consequence of such visits, become negligent in their spiritual exercises, less obedient, somewhat haughty in their behavior, freer in their manner of speaking, be convinced that, if you do not put a stop at once to these visits, you will have to render a very strict account to God, and that a very severe judgment will be in store for you.

A bad shepherd is he, who, when he sees the wolf coming, does not chase him away.

One of the greatest faults a Superior can commit is to allow himself to be so much impressed by the first information received that he is unable to attend to a second account and to weigh the truth of the first one. Here we have one of the most painful trials for an inferior, namely, to become aware that his Superior's heart is so preju-

diced against him that it would be useless to endeavor to defend and justify himself before him. To stand such a trial an inferior needs a more than ordinary grace. For this reason, I conjure you not to believe at once as true what is reported to you, and not to come to a decision before obtaining a full knowledge of the case.

The judge who listens only to one part of a case will seldom pronounce a just judgment.

When you think it to be your duty to speak to one of your subjects about his faults, do not do so when excited, nor in a contemptuous, haughty, passionate manner. First consider the matter quietly before God, so as to find out the time, place, and manner to best effect the amendment of your inferior. Pray fervently and humbly to the Holy Ghost, that, whilst you speak

to the ear of the guilty one, He may by His holy inspiration open his heart. If it be necessary to use reproachful words remove their bitterness by the expressed assurance that you are moved by the best and most charitable intention for the true spiritual welfare of him whom you reprove.

If the bee does not draw its sting out of the flesh of him whom it has pierced, it will die and will leave in the wound the poison that will cause a painful swelling.

You will, without doubt, lead your community on the road of spiritual progress, and thus secure not only its spiritual but also its temporal happiness, if all your subjects have a true esteem and real love for you. Now, they will esteem you and put all their confidence in you, if your virtue is in accordance with your position; if you are the first to put your hand to the things that

are more difficult and more repugnant to self-love. Your subjects will love you, if they notice that, without being attached to any one in particular, you are anxious and careful for all, especially for those who are most forgetful of themselves and of what concerns them. They will have complete confidence in you, if they cannot but perceive that you have a hearty affection for them, and that you are so prudent and reserved that no one will ever become aware of what they have confided to you.

Esteem, love, and confidence are the three knots which unite the bonds between Superiors and inferiors so firmly, that neither Satan nor the world nor the flesh will ever separate them.

If under your administration all members of the community are content (which is only possible when all aspire after per-

fection) then thank God from your heart and give to Him alone the honor. But if, on the contrary, you find members in your community who are dissatisfied, then be consoled by the remembrance that St. Benedict lived with religious who disliked him and even hated him; that St. Bernard had for his secretary one who persecuted and calumniated him; that St. Francis of Assisi suffered greatly from Elias, his brother in religion; and that Jesus Christ, the ideal of perfect Superiors, patiently bore with the traitor Judas, who did far more wrong to Him than any one can do to you. Remember that the imperfect and discontented religious is like a file in the hand of a goldsmith, who uses it to free the gold from its dross, and that it is like a broom which cleanses the house.

The humble and zealous religious edifies the whole community, but the proud and

restless religious gives to his Superior and to the other members of the community an opportunity to practise many virtues and to become more pleasing in the sight of God.

Keep in your room the names of all the members of the community; pray for them every day, especially for those who stand most in need of your prayers. Endeavor to discover means for their amendment and never despair of your success. Do not allow a month to pass without having a quarter of an hour's talk with every single one of them, in order to learn their needs and their endeavor to acquire perfection; and try to dismiss them satisfied, at least by what you have said to them, if you cannot always do so by what you have done for them.

There is nothing that consoles religious so much and sweetens so easily the bitter

feelings which sometimes arise in their hearts, is an earnest, kindly talk with their Superior, and the sincere affection which he makes known to them from time to time.

CONSIDERATION

The office of a Superior is far more difficult than that of a general in an army, for it is more difficult to direct what is not seen than what is seen; it is also a more dangerous task, since it is a greater misfortune for a soul to perish than for a human body. For this reason the saints have at all times feared the office of Superior, and many have even fled from it as from a rock on which numbers have suffered shipwreck. Others only, when forced by obedience, have consented to be Superiors, and as Superiors they lived in a continual fear of losing their soul, having always a lively remembrance of the truth that they should

have to give an account to God not only of their own soul, but also of the souls of their inferiors, and that they should be guilty not only of the sins committed by themselves, but also of those sins committed by the persons confided to their care, which they should and could have prevented. Convinced of this truth and anxious to secure salvation, it is to be expected that every true religious will do all that he can to escape becoming a Superior, and this the more in our times, since it is now far more difficult to lead others in the way of religious perfection than it was in former days. Those who take upon themselves the duties of Superiors when forced to do so by obedience have, after all, no reason to rejoice, because, although they can count on God's special assistance, they must never forget that their judgment at last will be a strict one, because they have to give an account

of the doings and omissions of others, and that they will have to suffer for the sins which by their own fault they have not prevented.

Nothing is more discouraging than the consciousness that we are obliged to give an account of the sins of others and have to suffer punishment for all sins which we have not prevented when it was possible for us to do so.

Seventh Chapter

CONDUCT TOWARDS THE WORLD

Since you left the world in order not to see any longer what you used to see, and not to hear any longer what you used to hear, do not call all this back by frequent visits and conversations. What is the use of having left all this, if you still allow your mind to dwell on it? Is it sufficient to have gone far away from your father's house and to have lost sight of it, if you still keep vividly alive the remembrance of it? Do you imagine that your parents and friends speak differently in the parlor and around the fireside than they did when you were yet with them in the world? You say that when you wish to see them it is only to be

helpful to them in their endeavor to perfect themselves. This is, no doubt, a very good intention, and let us believe that it is equally sincere; but be on your guard, lest by your endeavor to restore and to keep up the health of others, you fall ill yourself, and, in endeavoring to assist others to become spiritual, you yourself become imbued with the spirit of the world.

Since the sin of our first parents, our nature is more inclined to do what is evil than what is good.

Stay away from the parlor as much as possible. Through this opening the bad atmosphere of the world enters very easily into the cloister and does harm to the inmates. The wicked enemy likes to retire to this entrenchment when he is forced to leave the strict enclosure, and he remains there watching for a chance to make an

attack. Through the parlor, as through a window, the world often enters into religious houses and causes spiritual havoc. Make it a rule to visit the parlor only when duty requires it. Tell me, would you willingly visit a place where many have already perished?

In the same measure as a religious loves his room of prayer, he will experience an aversion for the parlor; and the more he loves the parlor the less he loves his room of prayer.

Imitate the prudent traveler, who, when he has to pass through a dangerous place, recommends himself in a special manner to God and endeavors to pass through it as fast as possible. If you have to pass through the parlor, do likewise; recommend yourself in a special manner to your guardian angel, and remain in the parlor only

as long as is strictly necessary. Tell me, is it edifying, or is it not indeed scandalous, to see a religious spending his time in the parlor whilst the rest of the community are in the chapel reciting the divine office, or are otherwise usefully employed?

He who carefully shuns dangers will never suffer harm.

Use the time that may be allowed you for conversation with seculars so as to edify them, speaking to them about such things as may increase their love for virtue and their desire to practise it. Let them increase in their esteem of your sacred calling. How consoling for a father and for a mother to hear their son or their daughter speaking the language of angels! How happy do a brother and sister feel, if they learn from their brother and sister how to sanctify themselves! How delighted are

strangers who hear words full of piety coming from hearts burning with heavenly fire!

When the iron ball is sunk deep into the cannon, then it will pierce the thickest walls; in the same manner will words coming out of a heart filled with a burning love of God find their way into the most hardened hearts.

Do not inquire in the parlor after news, nor after what is going on in the world; rather, cut short in a prudent manner conversations about such things. What is the use of knowing them? They will only distract you and rob you of the spirit of recollection, and will fill your mind with strange and useless thoughts, annoying you during time of prayer. The Israelites, who, although they had an abundance of manna in the desert, still desired the flesh-pots of Egypt, proved unmistakably by this that

their hearts were not as yet detached from those past pleasures.

Man does not like to speak about and is quite unwilling to be instructed in what he does not like, and even less in what he hates.

In your intercourse with strangers observe always a prudent reserve, so that your whole behavior, your gestures, your words, and your looks shall be such as become a spouse of Our Lord; keep at a becoming distance from those with whom you speak and be mindful of religious modesty. It is acting foolishly to bring an easily combustible matter near the fire. Do not, without your Superior's knowledge, give a letter or a commission to any one. By acting contrary to this, you would act against your vow, bring harm to your soul, and expose yourself in the convent to greater spiritual dangers than you were exposed to in the

world. Sooner or later your manner of acting would also become known, to your great confusion.

The child which hides itself from the eyes of its mother exposes itself to great danger.

Speak to strangers with great esteem of those who live with you in the same community. Never speak to any one, whoever he may be, of disorders in the cloister, much less of the discomfort you may experience on account of them, except to him who can remedy the evil or give you really good advice. Remember that Cham was cursed because he did not guard the honor of his father, and Cain because he took the life of his brother.

Do not those who divulge the disorders found in a religious community and thus lessen the esteem which people have for it, in a certain sense make themselves guilty of

the same crimes as Cham and Cain? No wonder that they have to expect the same severe punishment.

Do not meddle in secular affairs, even if they regard the members of your own family, towards whom you now have no obligation except to pray often and fervently, that God may protect and assist them. Remember the words of the great Master: "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead" (*Matt.* viii. 22). If, according to the judgment of your Superior, Christian charity should require you to do something more for them, do so only in strict conformity with your Superior's orders. God most willingly listens to the prayers which good religious say for their parents, sisters, brothers, and friends; but He turns into confusion and disadvantage whatever else, without their Superior's approval, they undertake to do for them. Experi-

ence confirms the truth that the less religious are anxious for and busy themselves about their relatives, the more God Himself takes care of them.

God's blessing is always upon those religious who sacrifice themselves entirely to their vocation.

Shun all flattery, all unbecoming familiarity, and all extravagant protestations of friendship. The abomination of desolation foretold by the prophet Daniel was seen when an unworthy priesthood had taken possession of the temple of Solomon; and the greatest degradation and shame of the Christian religion, so bitterly lamented by the Saints, makes its appearance whenever in the places consecrated in a special manner to God worldly affairs are transacted and sensual, worldly pleasures are indulged in. It is a pity that a

religious, having chosen a vocation that demands humility, should give himself up to sensual indulgences and vanities. It is a pity that religious, having taken the vow of chastity, do not carefully avoid whatever can cause temptation against this virtue. Hell, which seems to be too terrible for other sins, seems not terrible enough for this kind of sin when committed by a religious.

The desire to see and to be seen, to give and to receive, to love and to be loved in return, have led great numbers into ruin.

CONSIDERATION

In olden times religious enjoyed such a respect among the people of the world that they were considered angels in the flesh. God worked so many miracles through them that people who were afflicted with disease hastened to them as to a certain

refuge. Remember what historians write regarding this matter. Let it suffice to mention what Paladius writes about the monastery of St. Isidore, where one thousand religious led such admirable holy lives that even those who were the least perfect possessed the gift of working miracles when it was for the glory of God. And why have not people in our times the same high opinion of those who live in religion? Why do we not see in our days similar miracles? May it be, perhaps, because God does not bestow as many favors upon religious as He used to do in former times; or is it because they have not reached the same degree of education; or can miracles be necessary no longer; or where else can we find the cause of this great difference? It will be in vain to try to find another one than this, namely, that whilst some religious are entirely dead to

the world, others have left the world only in part; that, whilst some consecrate their entire hearts to God without reserve, others hold back part of it for their parents and friends; that, whilst some cross the ocean and pass through the desert to live in perfect concealment from the world, others have left between themselves and their families only a narrow path and would be very much put out if they had not frequent visits from them. Can we wonder that God ignores the latter religious and makes known the former ones by extraordinary favors?

The one who loses himself entirely in God is thereby rendered able to work miracles.

THE END

DEARLY beloved soul, I come now to an end, but before concluding I must ask of you most urgently three things, which your love will not refuse to grant.

First of all, I entreat you to put to yourself, after the example of St. Bernard, this question, calling yourself by your own name: "Bernard, why didst thou come here?" and then add these words: "Bernard, thou must die one day; thou dost not know when, but sooner or later, and what wilst thou then wish to have done?"

Secondly, think at least once a week, earnestly, on the confusion which, on the day of judgment, will overwhelm a religious if he shall see himself in the presence of his parents and friends who held

him for a model of perfection, and who see him now amongst the reprobates; think what indignant accusations and reproaches he will have to hear from Jesus Christ, from the Blessed Virgin Mary, and from all the Saints, for having squandered the many graces that were bestowed upon him. What bitter, annihilating scorn he will then have to suffer from the wicked spirits! They will ask him of what use was it for him to have renounced the pleasures of this world, if he now be delivered up to eternal torments. On the other hand, behold the superabundant joys of those, who, after a pious life led for God, will be admitted to the never-ending joys of Heaven, to sing with all the angels and saints the ever-new canticles of praise and jubilation.

Thirdly, pray incessantly that God may always be better known and more honored,

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and that holy Church may spread more and more. Pray also for the welfare of the rulers of holy Church; for temporal princes; for your parents and for all the members of your family; for your friends; for all public and private necessities, as far as they are known to you; for the conversion of sinners, and, lastly, for the author and for the translator of this little book.

A. M. D. G.

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